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ABSTRACT

As the result of educational reform legislation passed in Texas in 1984, a recertification examination was instituted for practicing elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators. The deadline for successful completion of the test by educators was June 30, 1986. The emphasis was on measuring reading and writing abilities, and an anchor test was adopted that was linked with tests that were common in the educators' experience. Performance standards were established on the test. A 35-member advisory committee, which included 27 teachers and administrators, recommended the skills to be measured and assisted in item specification review. Subsequent background work included a field test involving over 5,000 educators, a review of items by 1,000 educators, dissemination of test copies to school districts for review, and distribution of 250,000 copies of the practice test. Only educators who had not taken source tests or scored below the Board of Education standards were required to take the state-approved test. On March 10, 1986, 205,000 teachers and administrators were tested for recertification. Those failing received a report and remediation guides and were scheduled for retesting in June. Educators who fail the test a second time will be denied employment in Texas public schools. (TJH)

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Educator Recertification Testing in Texas: Big State, Big Challenges

By Marvin Veselka

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Educational reform in Texas had many facets. One of the most controversial and emotional provisions was the one to test currently certified teachers and administrators. A statute passed in 1981 called for the testing of teacher candidates seeking their initial certificates, but not for the testing of practicing educators.

In 1984, the Select Committee on Public Education, appointed by Governor Mark White and chaired by H. Ross Perot, made numerous recommendations to modify education in Texas. A special session of the legislature was convened in the summer of 1984. The sole agenda was educational reform. Included in the many statutory mandates was the following:

> "The board shall require satisfactory performance on an examination prescribed by the board as a condition to continued certification for each teacher and administrator...
>
> The board shall prescribe an examination designed to test knowledge appropriate to teach primary grades and an examination designed to test knowledge appropriate to teach secondary grades. The secondary teacher examinations must test the knowledge of each examinee in the subject areas listed in Section 21.101 of this code in which the examinee is certified to teach and is teaching. If a teacher is not tested in an area of certification, the teacher must take

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the examination for that area within three years after beginning to teach that subject. The administrator examinations must test administrative skills, knowledge in subject areas, and other matters that the board considers appropriate. The examinations must also test the ability of the examinee to read and write with sufficient skill and understanding to perform satisfactorily as a professional teacher or administrator."

An additional provision called for the the test to be passed by June 30, 1986, or the educator could not be employed in public education in Texas.

The Texas Education Agency found itself in the fall of 1984 with a mandate to test, but the funds to carry out the directive had not been appropriated. The legislature was scheduled to meet again in January 1985. It was time to study and plan.

Legal staff determined that certification tests under development could not be used for recertification testing. In addition, legal staff concluded that appropriate content tests would have to be designed by specific job assignment. For example, if a teacher had been teaching 8th grade mathematics, the test must cover only the content of 8th grade mathematics and not the full scope of the secondary mathematics certificate. Using this standard, the number of tests needed to test all teachers and administrators was staggering. The estimated resources required to develop this battery of tests was equally staggering. The State Board of Education recommended to the legislature that the testing of reading and writing skills be

pursued, and that the subject matter testing be delayed until a determination could be made if it was needed. The assumption was that the state testing program would remove the small percentage of educators that did not possess the essential basic skills. This testing, paired with the fact that the state was also developing a new strengthened teacher evaluation system, might bring about the desired effect without the use of subject matter tests.

The emphasis was then placed upon measuring the ability of educators to read and write. Did the State of Texas really need to test all educators on these basic skills? According to Texas certification records, there are over 500,000 certified educators with Texas certificates of which approximately 210,000 are currently employed in public education in the state. These educators are employed by 1,069 school districts that vary in size from the city of Houston to towns with one-teacher schools. The logistics and projected expenses of conducting a testing program of this magnitude caused us to look for other options.

Most administrators and teachers have taken tests that indicate their verbal ability or their ability to use the English language. We considered a plan that would allow us to avoid testing educators who had taken other tests. The plan called for developing or adopting a base test or an anchor test that measures the desired reading and writing skills. The base test would be linked or equated with tests that were common in administrators' experiences. This list of common tests would include the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, the test of the American

College Testing Program, the Graduate Record Examination, and the National Teachers' Examination. All of these tests measure or have components that measure verbal skills. If the equating or linking was successful, then there would be a mechanism to relate scores on the base test to scores on these commonly used examinations. The plan also proposed that the board establish performance standards on the base test and use the equating to determine performance standards on the others. The educators could then request the testing company to send a report of their test scores to the state and if their scores met the standards they would not have to be tested. If they had never taken any of the identified tests or their scores were below the standard set by the State Board of Education, then they would have to take the state-approved base test. We estimated that this type of plan could potentially reduce our testing burden by approximately 75 to 80 percent.

The State Board of Education eagerly supported the concept and the plan was pursued to determine if it was feasible. The plan was distributed to a number of the leading measurement specialists in the nation, leading administrators in the state, and representatives of the test companies that would be involved. On a cold, snowy day in Austin, which in Texas is unusual, a panel of experts met to advise the Agency and the board on this matter. The discussions looked at technical issues as well as other political issues. The recommendation of this group was not to attempt the equating because of numerous technical problems. The testing companies also were reluctant and, in some cases,

adamant about not having their tests involved in a program that involved currently practicing educators.

The State Board of Education accepted the recommendation of the panel and determined the best option left was to develop a reading and writing examination specifically for the purpose intended. This recommendation was sent to the legislature and an appropriation of approximately $5 million was made to develop and administer the tests at state expense to 210,000 practicing educators prior to June 30, 1986. The legislature, in fact, included a rider that required that the funds be expended to measure only reading and writing skills and not to attempt subject matter skills testing.

In April 1985, a contract was awarded that incorporated the development of a reading and writing test with the administration, scoring and reporting of the test. The State Board directed that there was to be a reading subtest and a writing subtest and that the writing subtest would be composed of two parts, objective and written composition. To pass the test, an individual must meet a minimum standard in both reading and writing.

The use of educator input was seen as essential. Nominations were received from all of the education associations in the state. The initial advisory committee had 35 members of which 27 were teachers and administrators. Eight members were selected because they were interested citizens and recognized leaders in the state. This group was added so that the committee could not be seen as self-serving. The advisory committee met several

times during the summer of 1985. They recommended the ten skills to be measured and assisted in the review of item specifications. They also reviewed test items prior to a field test of the items. A special or minority panel was also convened prior to the field test to review items for potential bias. The recommendations of these committees were incorporated into all phases of the development process.

An example of advisory committee impact can be seen in a recommendation made in the area of written composition. Because of the pressure involved and the consequences of not passing, the committee recommended that the examinees be allowed to choose one of two writing prompts instead of requiring everyone to answer the same prompt. This would provide the examinee a feeling of being in control by having some level of choice. This recommendation was accepted even though it required the development and piloting of additional writing prompts in order to obtain pairs of prompts that were equal in difficulty.

The field test took place in October and involved over 5,000 teachers and administrators. Because of the level of interest, participation was excellent. After the field test, more than 1,000 teachers and administrators were invited to closed sessions to review items for validity purposes and to assist in recommending passing standards. Again, the participation was excellent.

Throughout the project, an attempt was made to maximize the flow of information to the educators. After the test specifications were developed, copies were disseminated to each school district in the state. A comprehensive study guide that

included a practice test was developed and 250,000 copies were distributed. This was done four months prior to the testing. In January of 1986, after the board set the passing standards for the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers, we developed and disseminated 250,000 copies of a document which explains the passing standards with particular emphasis on the written composition. Samples of essays that fall in the various scoring ranges were included.

Testing currently-employed administrators is not the most pleasant task one can undertake. Morale was low and anxiety was high throughout the state. Maximizing the flow of information at all phases of the development and preparation appears to be the key factor in our successful completion of the project. On March 10 we tested approximately 205,000 teachers and administrators in 850 locations. Any individual that fails will automatically be given an analytical report of their performance and a remediation guide along with the score report. The second opportunity to take the test will be June 28, 1986. Educators who fail the second time will be denied employment in the public schools of Texas.

There are numerous other issues I will be glad to discuss with anyone individually. The legislative purpose was to remove incompetence from the public schools. The mechanism used was a test of basic reading and writing skills. The results of the full impact of this measure will be something to report at one of our future meetings.